MARVEL COMICS

© 1990 MARVEL ENT GROUP INC

$1.00 US
$1.25 CAN
17
DEC
UK 60p

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

THE COSMIC AVENGER!

QUASAR

WHO WILL BE
THE FASTEST ONE
ALIVE?

CAPTAIN MARVEL?

SPEED DEMON?™

SUPER SABRE?™

BLACK RACER?™

THE WHIZZER?™

MAKKARI?™

QUICKSILVER?™

MANEY.

WENDELL VAUGHN . . . THE FIRST EARTH MAN EVER APPOINTED PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE. BONDED TO THE ENERGY-TRANSFORMING QUANTUM-BANDS THAT ARE BOTH WEAPONS AND SYMBOLS OF HIS STATION, HE FIGHTS AN ONGOING BATTLE TO DEFEND ALL LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE FROM COSMIC EVIL!

STAN LEE PRESENTS . . . QUASAR!

ABOARD TOAUN

AT THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN ATMOSPHERE AND EXOSPHERE, A **STARSHIP** SKIMS CARRYING THE **PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE** AND HIS COMPANIONS, THE **EX-SQUADRON SUPREME**, HOME AFTER A SEVERAL-DAY SOJOURN AT THE CORE OF THE GALAXY...

SURE IS FUN *RIDING SHOTGUN* LIKE THIS. NEVER FAILS TO GIVE ME *GOOSEFLESH* SEEING EARTH FROM THIS VANTAGEPOINT.

HEY--WHAT THE *HECK?* WHAT JUST FLASHED BY *ME?*

MARK GRUENWALD • WRITER
MIKE MANLEY • ARTIST
PAUL BECTON • COLORIST
JANICE CHIANG • LETTERER
LEW KAMINSKY • MANAGING ED.
HOWARD MACKIE • EDITOR
TOM DE FALCO • JOGGER IN CHIEF.

QUASAR™ Vol. 1, No. 17, December, 1990 issue. (ISSN #1051-6832) Published by MARVEL COMICS, James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Michael Hobson, Group Vice President, Publishing. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. **SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, N.Y. AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES.** Published monthly. Copyright © 1990 by Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. All rights reserved. Price $1.00 per copy in the U.S. and $1.25 in Canada. Subscription rate for 12 issues: U.S. $12.00; Canada $17.00; and foreign $24.00. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. QUASAR (including all prominent characters featured in this issue and the distinctive likenesses thereof) is a trademark of the MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, INC. **POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO QUASAR, c/o MARVEL COMICS, 9TH FLOOR, 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. Printed in the U.S.A.**

HOLY SHINOLA-- *WHATEVER* IT WAS, IT PASSED US LIKE WE WERE *STANDING STILL.*

THERE GO MY *QUANTUM-BANDS* TELLING ME SOMETHING EXTRATERRESTRIAL'S PENETRATED MY EARTH SURVEILLANCE WEB.

WHILE I TRY TO GET A FIX ON ITS *ENERGY*, LET ME CHECK IN WITH THE *FOLKS BELOW...*

HEY, *SPECTRUM--*

--YOU PICK UP THAT *THING* THAT JUST *BUZZED* US?

YEAH. WHAT *WAS* IT?

YOU WANT ME TO DO ANOTHER *ORBIT* WHILE YOU CHECK IT OUT?

I DON'T *KNOW*. I WAS LOOKING RIGHT AT IT, BUT I COULDN'T *TELL* MUCH...EXCEPT IT LOOKED *VAGUELY HUMANOID.*

NO. AS *FAST* AS IT WAS MOVING, THERE'S NO *TELLING* HOW LONG IT'D TAKE ME TO *CATCH UP* WITH IT--

--*WHOA!* JUST ANALYZED ITS ENERGY TRAIL, *TACHYONS** GALORE. FIGURES.

*HYPOTHETICAL FASTER-THAN-LIGHT PARTICLES.

DID QUAZE SAY SOMETHING ABOUT SOMEBODY *FAST?*

HUH? OH-- *MAKKARI.* YEAH, HE DID. SOME*BODY* OR SOME*THING.*

THAT'S *NORTH AMERICA* BELOW US. WHAT SAY WE PUT THIS FLYING TEAPOT BACK DOWN ON *TERRA FIRMA*?

COPY THAT, QUASAR. INITIATE *LANDING SEQUENCE.*

THIS HAS BEEN THE *LONGEST* I'VE BEEN OFF EARTH SINCE GETTING BACK FROM *URANUS* ALMOST A YEAR AGO.* HOPE THAT THING THAT BUZZED THE SHIP DOESN'T MEAN *TROUBLE.*

I COULD USE SOME *CATCH-UP TIME.*

*ISSUE #2.

SPECTRUM, RADIO THE BOYS AT *PROJECT: PEGASUS* AND TELL THEM WE'LL BE USING THEIR *PARKING LOT* AS A LANDING STRIP.

COPY THAT.

AND AFTER AN UNEVENTFUL LANDING AND DISEMBARKING...

SORRY TO LAND AND *RUN*, BUT I GOT A WHOLE LOT OF TO STUFF TO ATTEND TO -- THE MOST PRESSING OF WHICH IS CHECKING OUT THAT *GREMLIN* THAT DIVE-BOMBED US!

WHEN YOU'RE DONE WITH THAT, YOU'D BETTER SEE A *TAILOR* ABOUT A *NEW CAPE!*

LET US KNOW THE MOMENT YOU CAN GET HOLD OF *REED RICHARDS* OR *DR. STRANGE.* WE'RE ALL QUITE *ANXIOUS* TO GET BACK TO OUR *HOME DIMENSION.*

WILL DO! TAKE IT EASY, EX-SQUAD!

YAY! SHAPE GLAD SQUADDIES BACK!

WAIT--

--FOR

--*MEEEEEE*--!

DON'T LOOK *NOW*, MAK M'MAN, BUT YOU'RE RUNNING ON *AIR!*

FOR A COUPLE HUNDRED FEET, *SURE*--

--WHICH OUGHT TO BE JUST FAR ENOUGH TO GET ME TO THE *HUDSON RIVER!*

PRETTY *SMOOTH*, FLEETFOOT!

YOU KNOW, QUAZE-- YOU'VE REALLY BEEN SOUNDING *UPBEAT* SINCE OUR LITTLE TRIP TO THE *STRANGER'S WORLD*. WHAT'S THE *SCAM*, MAN?

HOLDING MY OWN AGAINST ALL THOSE *COSMIC CORNBALLS* GAVE MY SELF-CONFIDENCE ONE *HECKUVA* BOOST.

GROOVY! SO YOU GOT A BETTER IDEA OF WHAT THAT *HYPERFAST FLYING OBJECT* WAS?

NO, BUT I'VE GOTTEN A *FIX* ON WHERE IT ENTERED THE ATMOSPHERE AND WHAT ITS *TRAJECTORY* WAS. *THAT* MAY HELP. WHAT'S *YOUR* BIG INTEREST?

SPEED'S MY *LIFE*, MAN. IF THERE'S SOMETHING *FAST* HAPPENING ON THIS BIG BLUE MARBLE OF OURS, I WANT TO *KNOW* ABOUT IT.

HI, THERE, HUMANS! LOOKING FOR *SOMETHING*?

HUH?

WHERE'D *ME* COME FROM?

YOU CAN CALL ME *THE RUNNER*. I'M ONE OF THE *ELDERS OF THE UNIVERSE*, IF YOU KNOW WHO *THEY* ARE. LIKE MY SPIRITUAL BRETHREN, I'VE DEVOTED MY UNENDING LIFE TO A *SINGLE PURSUIT*. IN MY CASE -- THE THRILL OF THE *BODY IN MOTION!*

FOR EONS, I'VE TRAVERSED THE *UNIVERSE*, SEEKING OUT THE *FASTEST ENTITIES* I COULD FIND AND CHALLENGING THEM TO A *RACE!* SUCH IS MY *PASSION*, SUCH IS MY *PURPOSE!*

I HEAR TELL YOUR WORLD HAS A *HANDFUL* OF PRETTY *FAST MOVERS*. ANY IDEA WHERE I CAN *FIND* THEM?

YOU'RE LOOKING AT THE *FASTEST*, GOLDEN BOY!

AM I NOW? HOW *INTERESTING*! BUT I'M AFRAID I CAN'T JUST TAKE YOUR *WORD* FOR IT, FRIEND. *DEEDS* ARE WHAT COUNT, NOT WORDS. WOULDN'T YOU *SAY*?

WOULD YOU MIND PUTTING YOUR *LEGS* ON THE LINE AND RUNNING A *LITTLE RACE*?

ANY *TIME*, ANY *PLACE*...!

GOOD! GOOD! BUT NOT *NOW*, NOT *HERE*. THERE ARE SEVERAL *OTHERS* OF THIS WORLD'S DENIZENS I WISH TO *CONTACT* AS WELL.

I'LL BE IN *TOUCH* WITH YOU AS TO THE *PARTICULARS*, OKAY?

NICE *RUNNING* WITH YOU, MAKKARI!

VWOOM

GREAT ZURAS--!

EARTH TO MAKKARI! YOU CAN'T EXPECT TO KEEP *SKIMMING* ACROSS THE *WATER* YOU SUDDENLY *SLOW DOWN* LIKE THAT!

FAST... HE WENT SO FAST...

HOW 'BOUT I GIVE YOU A *LIFT* BACK TO THE CITY?

NOTICE HOW HE CALLED YOU BY *NAME* EVEN THOUGH YOU NEVER INTRODUCED YOURSELF? EITHER YOUR *REPUTATION* PRECEDES YOU OR HE'S *TELEPATHIC*.

MAN, DO I EVER WANT TO *WIN* THAT RACE!

CAREFUL, BUDDY. THERE MAY BE *MORE* TO IT THAN JUST A RACE. A FEW OF MY *FELLOW AVENGERS* HAVE HAD *RUN-INS*-- NO PUN INTENDED-- WITH THESE SO-CALLED *ELDERS*.

THEY'RE A *TREACHEROUS LOT* WITH ALL SORTS OF ULTERIOR MOTIVES. IF *I* WERE YOU, I'D THINK *TWICE* BEFORE CONSENTING TO--

NO. I'VE GOT TO *PROVE* I'M THE FASTEST MAN ON EARTH, NO MATTER *WHAT*. YOU KEEP AN *EYE* ON HIM, MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T PULL A *FAST ONE*...

...ALL *I* WANT TO WORRY ABOUT IS *RUNNING RINGS* AROUND THAT *YELLOW YAHOO*!

I CAN SEE HOW MUCH THIS *MEANS* TO YOU, GUY. OKAY, I'LL WATCH YOUR *BACK* FOR YOU.

GUESS THAT MEANS WE'D BETTER *STICK TOGETHER* TILL THIS RACE COMES OFF.

YOU'RE WELCOME TO STAY WITH ME AT MY *DAD'S HOUSE*. THERE'S A *GUEST BEDROOM* THERE. WHAT DO YOU SAY?

FINE.

AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH TOGETHER IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS, I FEEL I CAN *TRUST* MAK WITH MY *CIVILIAN IDENTITY*.

SOON, IN FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT . . .

MY RELATIONS WITH MY *DAD* HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT *STRAINED* LATELY BUT HE'S BASICALLY A *REAL GOOD PERSON*.

I'M SURE HE'LL *LIKE* YOU--THE MORE *BIZARRE* MY FRIENDS ARE, THE MORE HE *LIKES* THEM.

UH, THAT WAS A *JOKE*, MAK.

HMM. NO LIGHTS ON. HE MUST ALREADY BE IN *BED*.

CLICK

OH-- *DAD!*

WHAT ARE YOU DOING SITTING HERE IN THE *DARK*?

I . . . COULDN'T... *REST*...

DAD, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET A *FRIEND* OF MINE. MAKKARI'S AN *ETERNAL*, AN EVOLUTIONARY SPIN-OFF FROM HUMANITY. HE'S THE... *FASTEST MAN ON EARTH*.

MAK, MY DAD'S AN *ASTROPHYSICIST.*

PLEASED TO *MEET* YOU, SIR.

YES.

BOY, DOES DAD EVER SEEM *OUT OF IT*. IS HE STILL *MIFFED* AT ME OR WHAT?

IF YOU DON'T MIND...

...MAK'S GOING TO STAY IN THE *GUEST ROOM* FOR A FEW DAYS.

I DON'T MIND.

GREAT! WAIT'LL I TELL YOU WHAT I'VE BEEN *UP TO*, DAD. YOU'RE GOING TO WANT TO GET OUT YOUR *XENOLOGICAL NOTEBOOK*, THAT'S FOR SURE.

WELL, GUESS WE'LL CALL IT A *NIGHT*. SEE YOU IN THE *MORNING*, DAD.

GOOD NIGHT, SIR.

YES...

...GOOD NIGHT.

THE NEXT MORNING, AFTER A COMMUTE INTO NEW YORK CITY...

4

SO HERE'S WHERE I WORK DURING THE *DAY*, MAK. I RUN MY OWN COMPANY--A *SECURITY CONSULTANTS FIRM*.

I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO MY *EMPLOYEES*. BUT DON'T LET ON THAT I'M *QUASAR*. I HAVEN'T *TOLD* THEM YET.

I DIG.

HI, PEOPLE!

MR. VAUGHN, WHERE HAVE YOU *BEEN* THE PAST FEW DAYS--I'VE BEEN GOING OUT OF MY *MIND* TRYING TO REACH YOU!

CALLED AWAY ON UNEXPECTED *BUSINESS*--YOU KNOW, *THE USUAL*.

WE'VE BEEN *SWAMPED*, BOSS. *MISS STECKLEY* SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN A *POWDER*.

SHE *HAS*?

OH, LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO A NEW *BUDDY* OF MINE. *KEN TANAKA*, *KAYLA BALLANTINE*, THIS IS... UH, *MIKE KARNY*.

PUT IT *THERE*, MIKE.

MMM. HE'S ALMOST AS *CUTE* AS MR. VAUGHN!

NOW WHAT'S THIS ABOUT *MISS STECKLEY*?

WE DON'T *KNOW*.

TWO DAYS AGO, WHEN WE GOT BACK FROM *LUNCH*, SHE WAS *GONE*. HAVEN'T SEEN HER *SINCE*.

THAT'S ODD. SHE SEEMED SO *CONSCIENTIOUS*.

I HAVE TO *TELL* YOU, MR. VAUGHN, WHILE YOU WERE AWAY, SHE INSISTED ON WORKING IN *YOUR OFFICE*! I TRIED TO *STOP* HER, BUT--!

MY... *OFFICE*.

EXCUSE ME A MOMENT. I'VE GOT TO USE THE *FACILITIES*.

AGAIN? YOU JUST *WENT*.

OH, *NO*--WHAT IF MISS STECKLEY SOMEHOW DISCOVERED THE PASSAGEWAY INTO *EON'S STAR CHAMBER*?

WHAT IF SHE WAS THE *COSMIC ASSASSIN* COME TO KILL MY MENTOR?

I HAVEN'T CHECKED IN WITH EON IN *OVER 24 HOURS*! I ASSUMED HE'D CONTACT *ME* IF SOMETHING WAS WRONG! WHAT IF--?

OH, MY GOD... HE'S GONE--!

EON!

YES, MY PROTECTOR?

WHEW! YOU NEARLY GAVE ME A *HEART ATTACK*. WHAT WERE YOU DOING SO *SMALL*?

ALL SIZE IS *RELATIVE*.

I GUESS, SO, UH, EVERYTHING'S *COOL* HERE ON THE HOME FRONT?

YES, "COOL."

GREAT. I JUST GOT BACK FROM THE *STRANGER'S WORLD* AND MAN, YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN WHAT *HAPPENED* THERE.

YOU ARE REFERRING TO YOUR SAVING THE LIVES OF A *BILLION WATCHERS*, I WOULD IMAGINE.

YEAH! HOW'D YOU *KNOW*?

I BELIEVE I MENTIONED TO YOU THAT I KEEP ABREAST OF THE ACTIVITIES OF *COSMIC CLASS ENTITIES*.

OH, YEAH. WELL, I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU THAT I FEEL REALLY *GOOD* WITH THAT *VICTORY* UNDER MY BELT.

I FINALLY FEEL LIKE I'M UP TO BEING *PROTECTOR*.

THAT IS GOOD.

OH, WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT AN ELDER NAMED *THE RUNNER*?

HE'S ONE OF THE MORE *HARMLESS* OF THE THOUSAND OR SO ELDERS I'M AWARE OF.

THAT'S GOOD TO KNOW. OKAY, I'VE GOT TO *GO*. PEOPLE ARE *WAITING* FOR ME.

?

SEE YOU *LATER*.

HULLP!

LATER THAT DAY, IN THE MID-ATLANTIC...

QUASAR SAYS HE DID SOME *CHECKING UP* ON THIS *RUNNER* DUDE AND AS FAR AS HE'S CONCERNED, THE GUY'S PRETTY *HARMLESS*.

FINE BY ME. I'D HATE TO GET MY *HOPES* UP THAT I'M GONNA RUN A *FAIR RACE* WITH THE GUY, AND THEN HE *CHEATS* ON ME.

WONDER WHO THE *OTHER FAST FOLK* HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO CONTACT ARE? OTHER THAN THE SQUADRON'S *WHIZZER*, I'M NOT AWARE OF ANYBODY ELSE IN *MY* LEAGUE.

TRAINING FOR THE *BIG RACE*, ARE WE?

HUH?

THE *RUNNER*!

YOU'VE GOT *GOOD FORM*, EARTHMAN. THE ONLY *POINTER* I'VE GOT FOR YOU IS TO RELAX YOUR *HANDS* A BIT -- A *TIGHT FIST* ONLY DIVERTS ENERGY FROM WHERE YOU REALLY *NEED* IT... SEE?

GRRR.

I'VE *HAD IT* WITH THIS ALIEN DOING HIS *SUPERIORITY NUMBER* ON ME...

I'M GOING TO *DITCH* HIM, LET HIM EAT MY *SPRAY*...!

BUT I DIDN'T COME TO GIVE YOU *RACING TIPS*. I'VE COME TO -- *MAKKARI*?

VRUSH

HMM. NICE BURST OF *SPEED*.

BUT *NOBODY* RUNS OFF WHEN I'M ADDRESSING THEM.

VROOM

I DO BELIEVE MAKKARI'S TRYING TO *LOSE* ME. PERHAPS HE HAS MISTAKEN THIS FOR THE *ACTUAL RACE*.

I'D BETTER *RECTIFY* THAT NOTION.

SLOW *DOWN*, FRIEND--HOW AM I SUPPOSE TO TELL YOU THE PARTICULARS OF THE *BIG RACE* IF YOU KEEP RUNNING FASTER THAN THE *SOUND OF MY VOICE*?

DOING MY *DARNEDEST*--AND GOLDEN BOY *KEEPS UP* WITH--AND *EFFORTLESSLY*, IT LOOKS LIKE!

THE BIG RACE WILL BEGIN 1.25 PLANETARY *ROTATIONS* FROM NOW. I HAVE CONTACTED *SIX* OTHER PARTICIPANTS BESIDES YOURSELF. MEET US AT LATITUDE 37 DEGREES NORTH, LONGITUDE 116 DEGREES.

THE *WINNER*, INCIDENTALLY, WILL BE GIVEN THE GREATEST *PRIZE* IN ALL THE GALAXY! ANY *QUESTIONS*?

NO.

GOOD. I WOULDN'T *OVERDO* THE TRAINING, MAKKARI. YOU'LL WANT TO BE FRESH FOR THE RACE.

BYE!

HUH? WHERE--?

NNNH. AN *ISLAND*--BETTER TAKE A BREATHER.

LEFT *CALF* FEELS TENDER--OH PLEASE DON'T TELL ME I *PULLED A MUSCLE*--!

NEW YORK CITY, AN HOUR LATER...

SPECTRUM? HI. QUASAR HERE. TELL YOUR FRIENDS I FINALLY GOT HOLD OF *DR. RICHARDS* AND MADE AN APPOINTMENT TO USE HIS *SPACE-TIME MACHINE* THIS SATURDAY AT 10 A.M.

GREAT! THAT MEANS THE *WHIZZER* WILL STILL HAVE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THE *BIG RACE*. HE'S VERY *KEEN* ON TESTING HIS METTLE AGAINST *YOUR* WORLD'S SPEEDSTERS.

OH. SO HE'S BEEN CONTACTED *TOO*, HUH? FIGURES.

A DAY AND A HALF LATER, IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST...

HAVEN'T SEEN *MAKKARI* SINCE I TOLD HIM WHAT EON TOLD ME ABOUT THE RUNNER. I HOPE HE HASN'T BEEN *PRACTICING* ALL THIS TIME!

GUESS I'LL SOON FIND OUT. HERE'S WHERE SPECTRUM TOLD ME THE *STARTING LINE* WAS-- AND THERE'S *SPECTRUM* AND THE *WHIZZER*!

WOW! WHO ALL HAS THE RUNNER ASSEMBLED HERE? THAT'S *QUICKSILVER* OF THE WEST COAST AVENGERS CLIMBING OUT OF THAT QUINJET... AND THAT'S *CAPTAIN MARVEL* THE RUNNER'S TALKING TO.

DON'T RECOGNIZE THE *OTHERS*.

THIS IS *NOT* A CONTEST OF *FLIGHT SPEED*, DEAR CAPTAIN. IF YOU FAIL TO TOUCH YOUR FEET TO THE SURFACE SAY ONCE EVERY FIFTY METERS OR SO, I'M AFRAID YOU'LL BE *DISQUALIFIED*!

I'LL *TRY*, BUT IT'S NOT MY NATURAL WAY TO TRAVEL!

HI, CAPTAIN MARVEL!

HELLO, QUASAR! DON'T TELL ME THIS GILDED ALIEN'S TALKED *YOU* INTO RUNNING THIS *MARATHON*, TOO!

NOPE, I'M JUST HERE AS AN *OBSERVER*. A *BUDDY* OF MINE'S COMPETING, THOUGH I DON'T *SEE* HIM HERE YET.

I GOT A *QUESTION*, FOR YOU, RUNNER. WHERE DO YOU INTEND TO *HOLD* THIS RACE? I WANT TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT NO *BYSTANDERS* ARE ENDANGERED BY THE *HIGH-SPEED HIJINKS*.

OH, THERE WON'T BE ANY *BYSTANDERS* WHERE THEY'RE RUNNING.

HOW CAN YOU BE *SURE*?

BECAUSE THE RACECOURSE IS *NOT ON EARTH*.

VWOOM

BEHOLD!

WHAT THE--?

YOU--MADE THAT?

I *ACTIVATED* IT, YES, BUT I DID NOT *BUILD* IT. MY FELLOW ELDER, THE *ARCHITECT*, CONSTRUCTED IT TO MY SPECIFICATIONS.

IT'S SOME SORT OF *ENERGY-CONSTRUCT*--LIKE MY QUANTUM-BANDS MAKE.

WHERE'S IT *TERMINATE*?

ON YOUR PLANET'S *MOON*, 384,392 KILOMETERS FROM HERE. BUT ALONG THE WAY IT TAKES A LITTLE DETOUR THROUGH *WARP SPACE*. WE MUST TAKE IN ACCOUNT THE *MOTIONS* OF THE *HEAVENLY BODIES*, NOT NOW EXCUSE ME.

RACERS, IF I MAY HAVE YOUR *ATTENTION*. HERE ARE YOUR *MARKS*. LET'S LINE UP AND I'LL GO OVER THE *RULES*.

HMM! MAKKARI STILL HASN'T SHOWN UP. WHAT IN THE WORLD COULD BE KEEPING HIM?

THIS, MY FRIENDS, IS A *MARATHON TO THE MOON*. WHOEVER MAKES IT FIRST TO THE *FINISH LINE* WINS.

IN THE EVENT *NONE* OF YOU COMPLETES THE COURSE, THE CONTESTANT WHO HAS GONE THE *FARTHEST* WHEN EVERYONE ELSE HAS QUIT WILL BE DECLARED THE *WINNER*.

THIS IS A CONTEST OF *SPEED, ENDURANCE, STRATEGY*, AND *WILL*. *CHEATING* WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN ANY WAY. WHOEVER IS CAUGHT INTENTIONALLY *INTERFERING* WITH THE PERFORMANCES OF HIS FELLOW CONTESTANTS WILL BE IMMEDIATELY SENT BACK TO *EARTH*.

THE *RACEWAY ENVIRONMENT* TOTALLY SIMULATES CONDITIONS HERE ON YOUR PLANET AT *SEA LEVEL*. THERE ARE *COMFORT STATIONS* EVERY 107 KILOMETERS FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO NEED *NUTRITIONAL REPLENISHMENT* OR *WASTE MANAGEMENT*.

ANY QUESTIONS?

YES. WHY DID I EVER *AGREE* TO THIS SILLY THING?

POSSIBLY FOR THE SAME REASON *I* DID: TO PUT YOUR BODY TO THE *ULTIMATE TEST*.

OKAY. IF THERE ARE NO MORE QUESTIONS, CONTESTANTS--

WAIT A MINUTE, RUNNER. SOMEBODY WANTS IN YOUR *DOME*.

I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D *MAKE* IT, MY FRIEND.

YOU WISH.

CONTESTANTS ON YOUR *MARK*...

...*GET SET*...

GO!

PHOOM

WHAT *IS* THIS? THE RUNNER'S NOT *RUNNING*! HE'S THE ONE I WANT TO TEST MY SPEED AGAINST--NOT *THESE* ALSO-RANS!

I'LL WAIT FOR YOU AT THE *FINISH LINE*, MAK!

HA!

10 KILOMETERS...

WHO *ARE* THOSE RACERS WHO'VE TAKEN THE LEAD? I DON'T *RECOGNIZE* ANYONE.

100 KILOMETERS...

THE TWO I'VE PASSED ARE GOING TO BURN OUT *EARLY*, I CAN TELL.

1000 KILOMETERS...

I AM ENERGIZED BY *COSMIC ENERGY*--SURELY NONE OF THE OTHERS HAS SO *EFFICIENT* A POWER SOURCE.

10,000 KILOMETERS...

YES! I'VE TAKEN THE *LEAD*--NOW I NEED ONLY *MAINTAIN IT* FOR... THE REST OF THE COURSE, HOWEVER *LONG* IT MAY BE.

IF ONLY I COULD READ THE *SIGN POSTS* MARKING DISTANCES--I'D KNOW HOW MUCH *FARTHER* THERE IS TO GO!

AS THE MILES MELT BENEATH THEIR FEET, THE SEVEN RUNNERS LOSE THEMSELVES IN THOUGHT...

THIS IS *INSANE*! I AM A *SPRINTER*, NOT A MARATHONER. WHAT WAS I *THINKING* OF--?

BLACK RACER

ARRGH! HOW CAN THERE BE SO MANY PERSONS *FASTER* THAN ME? ALL MY PRISON STAYS MUST HAVE *RUINED* MY CONDITIONING!

SPEED DEMON

OH, IF THEY'D ONLY HELD THIS RACE WHEN I WAS IN MY *PRIME*! STILL, I'LL OUTLAST *SOME* OF THESE YOUNG WHIPPER-SNAPPERS!

SUPER-SABRE

THE YEARS I SPENT LIVING ON THE *MOON* WITH ITS 1/6 EARTH GRAVITY MAY BE MY *UNDOING*! *MUSCLE MASS*... *STAMINA*... ALL *DIMINISHED*!

QUICKSILVER

I THINK I'M GETTING THE *HANG* OF THIS! I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO GO *LIGHT SPEED* ANYMORE, BUT MY *ENDURANCE* IS SECOND TO NONE!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

THIS IS *FUN*! ON MY WORLD I NEVER HAD *ANYONE* TO PIT MYSELF AGAINST! MAKKARI, *LOOK OUT*!

WHIZZER

NNNH! CALF'S STARTING TO FEEL *SORE* AGAIN!

GOTTA *BLANK* IT OUT, KEEP ON *KEEPING ON*...!

MAKKARI

32,000 KILOMETERS...

EXCUSE ME, CAPTAIN. BUT I'M AFRAID YOU ARE NOT *TOUCHING* THE GROUND OFTEN ENOUGH TO QUALIFY AS *RUNNING*.

REALLY?! I... I GUESS I WASN'T *CONCENTRATING* ENOUGH--!

BACK TO *EARTH* YOU MUST GO!

25,000 KILOMETERS...

SEE ANY OF THE *RUNNERS*?

NOT YET. BUT I--WAIT.

GOTTA *RUN*!

HE TURNED BACK TOWARD *EARTH*! WHY...?

QUANTUM-BANDS JUST PICKED UP SOMETHING PENETRATING MY *SURVEILLANCE WEB* AROUND EARTH! AS MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO *SPECTATE*, I'VE GOT A *JOB* TO DO!

20,000 KILOMETERS...

YRRTHOOM

NNNNH!

I...I...HAVE FORM AGAIN!

WHERE AM I?

THIS IS NOT MY SPACE... I'M SOMEWHERE ELSE.

WHAT'S HAPPENED? WHY AM I HERE? THE LAST THING I REMEMBER IS...IS RUNNING...

...NEED...

...TO...

...RUN!

AND, JUST EMERGING FROM QUANTUM-SPACE...

HEY! WHAT HAPPENED?

WAIT A MINUTE. I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHO I AM!

ALL I KNOW IS... THERE'S THIS BALL OF ENERGY--LIKE LIGHTNING--INSIDE ME, FILLING ME WITH THE NEED TO... TO MOVE...

THE THING I DETECTED SHOULD HAVE BEEN RIGHT BELOW!

HMM! HE *WAS* HERE-- MERE *MOMENTS* AGO, TO JUDGE BY THE *FRESHNESS* OF HIS TRAIL--

--BUT NOW HE SEEMS TO BE HEADING DOWN THE *RACEWAY* AWAY FROM THE EARTH SAME AS *EVERYONE ELSE*.

AND THE *TACHYON DISCHARGE* I DETECT RIVALS THAT OF THE *RUNNER*!

I'D BETTER WARP OUT *AFTER* HIM. HE COULD MEAN *TROUBLE* FOR THE OTHER RACERS!

49,000 KILOMETERS...

...DON'T KNOW IF I CAN GO *ANOTHER STEP!*

67,000 KILOMETERS...

HURRF

HURRF

HURRF

HUH?

81,000 KILOMETERS...

GOT A *STITCH* IN MY SIDE THREE STATIONS BACK... *KILLING* ME BUT I GOTTA RUN *THROUGH* IT...

WHAT WAS *THAT...?*

121,000 KILOMETERS...

EVERY STEP *TORTURE*-- BUT I AM *NOT* A QUITTER! I WILL RUN TILL I *COLLAPSE*, AND THEN I WILL *CRAWL*--!

WHAT IN--?

BLAST IT! JUST MISSED HIM *AGAIN!* NOT THAT I COULD DO ANYTHING TO *STOP* HIM FROM *OUTRUNS* WITHOUT BREACHING THE RACEWAY.

HMM! HE PASSED *QUICKSILVER* AND PROBABLY SOME *OTHERS* WITHOUT DOING ANYTHING TO THEM. MAYBE *HE'S* NO MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE *RUNNER* IS.

OKAY, MISTER, I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO *CATCH UP*, BUT I CAN HEAD YOU OFF AT YOUR *DESTINATION*. TIME TO LEAP TO THE *FINISH LINE* AND WAIT FOR YOU THERE!

199,000 KILOMETERS...

OH, FOR THE LOVE OF ZURAS--! THE WHIZZER JUST *PASSED* ME! I *KNEW* THIS *SUM CALF* WAS SLOWING ME DOWN--I JUST DIDN'T REALIZE HOW *MUCH*!

DIG *IN*, DUDE! YOU DIDN'T HOLD THE *LEAD* ALL THIS WAY JUST TO HAVE THAT *ALTERNATE* *GARTHER* STEAL YOUR THUNDER!

LONGER STRIDES... *IGNORE* THE PAIN... DON'T LET HIM *GAIN* ANOTHER INCH...!

CURSE ME FOR OVERTRAINING! WHAT A *CHUMP* I WAS! SHOULD'VE TAKEN IT *EASIER*!

I...I'M *GAINING* ON HIM! ALL RIGHT, MAINTAIN THE *GAP* FOR A FEW MORE THOUSAND KILOMETERS--

--THEN CREEP UP HIS *EXHAUST PIPE*--!

UH! I'M HITTING *THE WALL*--THE OUTER *LIMIT* OF MY SPEED--I CAN'T GO A *HAIR FASTER*--!

--CAN'T *CLOSE* THE ZURAS-CURSED *GAP*!

SO WHY *SHOULD* I? WHAT'S THE *POINT* OF ALL THIS ANYWAY? WHAT IS THE *REASON* I ENDURE THIS AGONY?

MY ACHIEVEMENT WOULD BE *MEANINGLESS*! THIS TORTURE *POINTLESS*!

A TON OF MY FAVORITE *FOOD*? A WEEK OF *SLEEP*? A ROOM FULL OF *WOMEN*? NONE OF THAT MEANS *ANY-THING*!

IS IT SO I CAN BE HAILED THE *WORLD'S* *FASTEST MAN*? BIG DEAL. THE RUNNER'S PROBABLY *FASTER*, AND EVEN IF *HE'S* NOT, SURELY *SOMEBODY* OUT THERE IS.

I'VE GOT TO THINK OF A *BETTER* REASON TO TAKE ANOTHER STEP. WHAT *REWARD* CAN I GIVE MYSELF IF I WIN--WHAT WILL MAKE THIS *WORTH IT*?

NONE OF THAT CAN JUSTIFY THE *PAIN* I'M IN!

THEN...UNTIL A REASON COMES *ALONG*...

...I'M GOING TO GIVE IT ALL MY *STRENGTH* AND *HEART* AND *SOUL* ANYWAY...

...AND WORRY ABOUT REASONS *LATER*.

I *AM*... THEREFORE I *RUN*. REASON ENOUGH!

DID I PASS HIM? I THINK SO. DOESN'T MATTER.

I'M NOT DOING THIS TO BEAT HIM.

I'M DOING THIS...

...TO BEAT ME...!

MY FLESH, MY MUSCLE, MY BODY-- IS MY ENEMY.

I MUST BEAT IT INTO SUBMISSION.

I MUST TRANSCEND MY PHYSICAL LIMITS.

I MUST LET MY SPIRIT RUN FREE!

THE PAIN IS GONE NOW. I DON'T FEEL A THING. I AM NO LONGER A BODY RUNNING THROUGH SPACE.

I AM RUNNING.

I AM SPEED.

I AM LIGHT.

NO.

384,892 KILOMETERS FROM EARTH...

OKAY. QUANTUM-JUMPED TO THE *MOON*, MANAGED TO MAKE IT INSIDE THE *TERMINAL* WITHOUT BLOWING OUT THE *ATMOSPHERE*... NOW ALL THAT'S LEFT TO DO IS *WAIT*.

WONDER HOW LONG IT'S GOING TO TAKE FOR SOMEONE TO *RANSOM*. IT'S BEEN OVER *EIGHT HOURS* ALREADY.

WISH I'D HAVE BROUGHT A *MAGAZINE*.

SOONER OR LATER...

AH, COME TO WATCH THE *WINNER*, QUASAR?

HUH?

NOT EXACTLY. SOME MOBILE *ORGANISM* ENTERED THE RACETRACK AT ITS FIRST JUNCTURE INTO *WARP SPACE*. IT'S *VERY FAST* AND IS *HEADING* THIS WAY.

I'M HERE TO SEE IF IT'S *HOSTILE*.

ANYONE EVER TELL YOU THAT YOU *WORRY* TOO MUCH, QUASAR?

SKODDD

AND HERE HE *COMES*!

AND THE *WINNER* OF THE MARATHON TO THE MOON IS--

--WHAT'S YOUR *NAME*, SIR?

HMMM.

I'M NOT SURE. "*BURIED ALIEN*"...SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

WELL, BURIED, HOW IT'S FEEL TO BE THE *FASTEST MAN ALIVE?*

IT FEELS... *RIGHT.*

HE'S AN *EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL*... PERHAPS FROM AN *ALTERNATE EARTH* LIKE THE WHIZZER.

COME, MY FRIEND, I WILL GIVE YOU WHAT YOUR *HEART* MOST DESIRES--A CHANCE TO COMPETE IN THE *GALACTIC MARATHON!*

BUT I JUST WANT TO GO *HOME*... I THINK.

SPEED IS YOUR HOME, MY FRIEND.

WE MUST BE *OFF*. SEE TO IT THE CONTESTANTS MAKE IT BACK TO *EARTH*, WON'T YOU? THE RACEWAY WILL *DISINTEGRATE* IN TWO EARTH ROTATIONS.

MAKKAR!

WHOOD

BLIP

I...*LOST*, DIDN'T I? I'M *NOT* THE FASTEST MAN ON EARTH.

SURE YOU ARE, MAK. WHOEVER IT WAS THAT *PASSED* YOU IS *NOT* FROM EARTH AND IS NOWHERE *NEAR* EARTH ANYMORE.

BE *GLAD* YOU RAN A *CLOSE SECOND*. IF YOU'D BEEN *FIRST*, THE RUNNER WOULD HAVE SPIRITED YOU OFF TO *PARTS UNKNOWN* AND I'D PROBABLY NEVER *SEE* YOU AGAIN.

I ASK YOU, WHAT IN THE WORLD WOULD I *DO* WITHOUT A PAL LIKE *YOU?*

YOU'RE...YOU'RE A *GOOD FRIEND*, QUASAR.

FINIS.